



PSC NEWS

Missouri Public Service Commission

Contact: Kevin Kelly
FY-02-64

Phone: (573) 751-9300

Governor Office Building, Suite 900

PSC TO BEGIN EMERGENCY RULEMAKING PROCEEDING ON COLD WEATHER RULE

Jefferson City (October 23, 2001)---In a continued effort to help Missouri customers with high natural gas bills from last winter, the Missouri Public Service Commission will evaluate the current Cold Weather Rule procedures through an emergency rulemaking proceeding.

“We are carefully evaluating the current Cold Weather Rule given the extraordinary circumstances caused by last winter’s high natural gas prices,” stated Commission Chairman Kelvin Simmons. “As we have stated several times in the past, there are approximately 29,000 households in Missouri currently without natural gas service and another 50,000 plus households facing disconnection of natural gas for non-payment.”

The Cold Weather Rule, designed to help customers with heat-related utility bills, is in effect from November 1st through March 31st and has been a part of the Commission’s rules and regulations since 1977. Since its inception, the rule has helped nearly two million needy customers maintain heat-related service during the winter. Since 1977, the rule has undergone several revisions. In 1993, the Commission added a temperature provision to the rule. Now, the Cold Weather Rule prohibits the disconnection of heat-related service when temperatures are predicted to fall below 30 degrees. A utility company cannot shut off service on a day when the National Weather Service has issued a local forecast between 6:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m., for the following 24 hours, predicting the temperature will drop below 30 degrees.

The Cold Weather Rule allows customers to maintain service under certain payment terms, restricts deposits, ensures customers are given adequate notification of a proposed discontinuance, encourages customers who can’t pay their utility bills to seek financial assistance through available sources and provides special provisions for the state’s elderly and handicapped.

The Cold Weather Rule contains provisions for those customers who can’t pay their utility bill in full at one time but want to maintain existing service. Under the rule that customer must: (1) contact the

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utility company and express an inability to pay the bill in full; (2) apply for energy assistance; (3) provide income information if requested; (4) make a minimum payment; and (5) enter into a payment agreement.

“We are determined to carefully review our current rule and determine if it can be modified to help Missourians who are struggling with high natural gas bills,” stated Simmons. “Timing is critical as we face colder weather in the very near future. We intend to move quickly and have instructed our PSC Staff to move forward with emergency rulemaking proceedings.”

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